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From Mental Holism to the Soul and Back

Mark Textor

Abstract: In his *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* Brentano proposed a view of consciousness that neither has room nor need for a subject of mental acts, a soul. Later he changed his mind: there is a soul that appears in consciousness. In this paper I will argue that Brentano's change of view is not justified. The subjectless view of consciousness can be defended against Brentano's argument and it is superior to its predecessor.

1. Introduction

Descartes famously reported that in introspection he was aware of a simple substance, a *soul* or *self*. In his *Treatise* Hume, equally famously, countered:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself* I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. (Hume 1739/40, 252)

In Hume's introspection no mental substance is given, *only* perceptions are.¹

In his *Psychologie vom Empirischen Standpunkt* (1874) Brentano found himself in agreement with Hume:

Neither sensation nor inner perception presents us with a substance. Just as in sensation we encounter the phenomena of warmth, colour and sound, we encounter in inner perception the phenomena of thinking, feeling and willing. An entity which has them as properties we don't encounter. It is a fiction, which has no reality at all or, if it existed, its existence could not be certified. (Brentano 1874 I, 15-16 [8]; my translation)²

Consciousness or inner perception presents us with activities such as thinking and feeling, but not an active subject. Brentano goes on to say that the soul is a fiction. This is an over-statement. A soul may not be an object of experience, yet it may be an object of whose existence we convince ourselves by an inference to the best explanation.

However, it took Brentano just a few years to make a complete u-turn. In his manuscript 'Von der Seele' ('On the Soul') one can read:³

1. I take a soul to be a substance whose accidents are the mental activities of the man. I call those accidents mental activities that are directed upon an object or, in Descartes' terminology, thinking something.
2. The existence of the activities is self-evident and will hardly be denied by a sensible person. In contrast some people think that they show particular scientific exactness when they dispute the legitimacy of conceiving of these activities as accidents of a substance.

When we say that you, a human being, see a rose, it is really a substance connected to the human being that has seeing a rose as an accident. Why does Brentano now side

with Descartes against Hume? Is the change justified? In this essay I will answer these questions and in answering them shed light on Brentano's ontology that underlies his view of consciousness.

I will proceed by first motivating Brentano's Mental Holism that has neither room nor need for a mental substance. The central claim of Mental Holism is that at any time one has only one presentation of which simultaneous seeing, hearing etc. are different 'sides' that can be distinguished only by abstraction (§§ 2 – 6). While Mental Holism is an attractive position, there is a main obstacle for it: simultaneous mental acts seem separable and therefore distinct (§ 7). Brentano responded to this problem by giving up Mental Holism and reintroducing the soul. Simultaneous mental acts are unified at a time by being accidents, particularized properties, of one and the same substance, a soul (§ 8). I will argue that the introduction of a soul does not solve the problem under consideration (§9). The soul is also not an object of experience as Brentano claimed (§§ 10 – 11). Since the introduction of the soul does not allow us to make progress, I will revisit the examples that are supposed to make the separability of simultaneous mental acts plausible. I will argue that they are compatible with Mental Holism (§ 12). Mental Holism should not easily be abandoned in favour of the soul theory.

2. Perceiving Some Things Together

When Brentano developed his theory of consciousness in chapters II and III of the second book of *Psychologie*, he considered one mental act, hearing a tone, in isolation. This is, as he stressed later, a simplification intended to ease the discussion of other features:

In reality, such a simple state never occurs. It frequently happens, instead, that we have a rather large number of objects before our minds simultaneously, with which we enter into many diverse relations of consciousness. (Brentano 1874 I, 221 [120])

The standard case is that we are directed on many diverse objects at the same time. Singular intentionality is a limiting case that is never realised. Consider an example that brings out the intuition Brentano appealed to. Tye imagines himself to be a ship passenger:

Standing by the railing of a ship and smelling the sea air, as I look at the ship's wake in the ocean, I hear the sound of a tugboat from afar. Intuitively, it is not simply that I have an experience of a vivid blue color and also an experience of a salty smell and further an experience of a booming sound. Color, smell, and sound are experienced together; there is, as it were, a seamless phenomenal whole within which these qualities are phenomenologically present. (Tye 2007, 289-90)

The passenger on the ship is simultaneously aware of a plurality of physical objects, colours, sounds, etc., together.

Brentano coined a number of different terms to cover different kinds of joint mental uptake of several things:

A ist miterfasst [co-apprehended] (1874 I, 182 [100])

A ist mitgegeben [co-given] (1874 I, 181 [99])

A ist mitanerkannt [co-acknowledged] (1890/1, 34 [36])

A is mitempfunden [co-sensed] (1890/1, 23 [26])

A is mitgeliebt [co-loved] (1907, 148)

Brentano's 'mit erfasst' is modelled on compound German verbs with 'mit' such as 'mitgefangen'. If a fisherman throws out his net, he may co-catch (*mitfangen*) things he did not intend to catch. These things are the *bycatch* (*Beifang*). The bycaught things are caught together with the fish in one throw of the net. Brentano has cases in mind where one acknowledges, loves etc. some things together, although one does not acknowledge, love etc. each of them in isolation. Consider as an example co-loving.⁴ Imagine that you love the taste of Parmesan cheese, but not its smell. If you go on using Parmesan in the kitchen, says Brentano, you *co-love* its sweet taste and you *co-love* its smell. For you prefer them to their absence. But it is not the case that you love the sweet taste and you love the smell: you hate the smell. You only love the smell together with the taste because you can't have the taste without the smell.

3. Mental Atomism and Holism

When you perceive some things together, is your joint perception composed of several perceivings each of which is directed on a particular object, say a tone?

Mental Atomists answer this question with YES. Hume is a paradigmatic example. Just as there are physical atoms, there are mental atoms, impressions and ideas. Ideas are representations in their own right: 'ideas always represent their objects or impressions' (Hume 1739/40, 1.3.14.6). There are no necessary connections between mental atoms. They exist independently of each other. Their behaviour is governed by causal laws. Joint awareness is some mental atoms

‘operating together’.

In *Psychologie* Brentano answered the question above with NO. He called his own view ‘unity of consciousness’:

The unity of consciousness, as it can be recognized with evidence from what we perceive in inner perception, consists in the fact that all mental phenomena which occur within us simultaneously such as seeing and hearing, thinking, judging and reasoning, loving and hating, desiring and shunning, etc., no matter how different they may be, all belong to one unitary reality already if they are inwardly perceived as existing together [*wenn sie nur als zusammenbestehend innerlich wahrgenommen werden*]. They are partial phenomena that make up one mental phenomenon [*als Teilphänomene ein psychisches Phänomen ausmachen*], the elements of which are neither distinct things nor parts of distinct things but belong to a real unity. This is what is necessary for the unity of consciousness, and no further conditions are required. (Brentano 1874 I, 232 [126])⁵

Let us go back to Tye’s example of a joint perception to unpack Brentano’s idea. If we are simultaneously aware of colours, sounds, smells etc. we can also be jointly aware of our simultaneous seeing, hearing, smelling etc. If we are jointly aware of these activities, argued Brentano, they form *one* mental phenomenon; consciousness at a time is one *unit*. Brentano’s basic claim is:

If one is co-aware of some simultaneous mental activities, these are parts of one consciousness.

Prima facie, this view is not distinct from Atomism: Brentano and Mental Atomists agree that one's consciousness at a time has a multitude of parts. However, they disagree about the nature of these parts. According to Brentano, if we are jointly aware of seeing, hearing, tasting etc., these activities are *conceptual* parts of a single mental act or presentation. According to the Atomists, these activities are *real* parts, mental acts that exist prior to the whole and that are directed on objects. Let us get clear about the difference by sharpening our understanding of the notion of a conceptual part.

Already in his *On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle*, Brentano argued that there are conceptual divisions to which no real difference corresponds, because 'the understanding [*Verstand*], in considering something, often divides into different concepts what is in itself one' (Brentano 1862, 131 [86]). The action *Brutus's stabbing of Caesar* is the same event as *the murder of Caesar*, conceptualised differently: once in terms of agent (Brutus), once in terms of the unfortunate patient (Caesar) of the action. Similarly, when one talks or thinks about hearing a note, one brings something that 'is in itself one' under one partial concept, when one talks or thinks about consciousness of hearing a note, one brings the same thing under a different partial concept. Consider Brentano's simplified model: consciously hearing a note:

The presentation of the tone and the presentation of the presentation of the tone form one single mental phenomenon, *it is only by considering it in its relation to two different objects*, one of which is a physical phenomenon and the other a mental phenomenon, that *we divide it conceptually* into two presentations. (Brentano 1874 I, 176–9 [97–8]; my emphasis, in part my

translation)

Consciously hearing a tone is not a combination of two prior mental acts each of which has causal powers and intentionality. It is one unit that can be brought under two different partial concepts and thereby a conceptual division is effected.

Brentano said in the quote above that one can bring a mental act under different concepts ‘only by considering it in its relation to two different objects’. Which objects? He distinguished between ‘immanent object’ or the ‘intentional correlate’ of a mental act and real object.⁶ Every mental act is supposed to have an intentional correlate, but some mental acts lack a real object. Take a case of auditory hallucination. When it merely seems to me that *F* is sounding now, there is an answer to the question ‘What does appear to you now?’; this answer specifies the immanent object. One cannot be directed on something without being directed on it in a particular way. Hence, there is no mental act without an intentional correlate, but the intentional correlate of an act is not itself the object of the mental. The immanent object is rather a mode of presentation, a way in which something is given to us. The real object is the object that is, in the good case, given under this mode of presentation.

We have a choice now: do the conceptual distinctions that one makes when one divides one activity in, for example, seeing and consciousness draw on the real objects or the immanent ones? Brentano himself was not explicit on this point. His student Marty, however, makes clear that the immanent objects are relevant for the conceptual division:

Someone who admits that simultaneously tones, colours and smells intentionally dwell in us [*intentional einwohnen*] cannot without contradiction deny that our activity of consciousness shows a plurality of subactivities and that in this sense a number of subactivities, sensations and thoughts is in us, a ‘manifold of co-existing ideas’ can in no sense be a mere chimaera. [...]

(Marty 1892, 141-2; my translation)

It suffices for an activity to be conceptually complex to have several intentionally in-existing objects, that is, immanent objects. If it has several immanent objects, it can be brought under different partial concepts and is therefore conceptually complex.

Marty added an important point:

But it would indeed be wrong to take these or the parts or sides of our simultaneous mental state that we mentioned earlier as a collective similar to a group of atoms or as a result of the states of such a group. And in this sense there can in fact be no earlier or later recurrence of an idea as if there were an individual that disappears from consciousness and returns later. (ibid.)

For Brentano and his followers our consciousness at a time has conceptual, but not real parts. The term ‘sides’ is used to signal that the parts of a mental act are not mental acts that each have causal powers and reference. A *side* of a polygon is not an object that exists prior to the polygon and the polygon is not composed of its sides.

Stumpf explicitly warned his readers that talk of parts is not to be taken literally in the realm of the mental:

Even the simultaneous presence of several elements in the same consciousness is a metaphor, a hypostatisation of the elements. We have one state in which we can distinguish by abstraction different sides. (Stumpf 1906/7, 235; my translation)

Let's get clear about the talk of 'distinguish by abstraction different sides' by considering an independent example of an act that has several objects. If I kill two birds, Tweety and Sparky, with one stone (throw), my killing Tweety is the same action as my killing Sparky.⁷ But I don't need to do two things to kill Tweety and Sparky. The fact that one action satisfies the description 'my killing of Tweety' as well as the description 'my killing of Sparky' does not require that it can be decomposed into two subacts. In this case talk of two killings or one complex killing composed of subacts is a hypostatisation. If we make a distinction between *killing Tweety* and *killing Sparky*, we merely register that ONE act has several objects.

In general, if one act has several objects, it satisfies several partial descriptions. In giving such a description one makes an abstraction in one of the literal senses of 'abstraction': one describes is 'abstracting' from some of its properties and relations. For example, to abstract a property is 'to present it to the mind apart from the other properties that usually go along with it in nature' (Bain quoted in OED entry). An abstraction is a partial conception of something in that it leaves something out.⁸

This idea can now be applied to mental acts. When we are co-conscious of colours, smells, sounds etc., there is one presentation of them. This presentation satisfies different partial descriptions, such as 'my hearing *F*', 'my seeing blue', etc. For our purposes the important point is that the reference of the presentation is not a

function of the reference of the abstract ‘parts’ one can distinguish in it. One can distinguish abstract parts – Brentano calls them ‘divisives’ or ‘distinctional parts’ – because the presentation has multiple objects. It is also the basis for forming the designations of mental acts in the first place.

If our consciousness has only conceptual parts, its reference, the objects it is directed on, cannot be determined by its composition of mental acts that each have a reference. Compare a list name such as ‘John, Paul, Ringo and George’. It is a combination of semantic atoms: ‘John’, ‘Paul’, ‘Ringo’ and ‘George’ each of which refers to one person. The list name refers to several people because it combines the independent ‘atoms’ ‘John’, ‘Paul’, ‘Ringo’ and ‘George’ in a particular way.

Atomists take our consciousness at a time to be like a list name: it is the result of a combination of independent atoms each of which refers to one particular thing. In contrast, Holists take our consciousness at a time to be similar to plural reference without syntactic complexity. Imagine that you point to the Beatles and say

These are 4 of the greatest musicians.

The demonstrative ‘these’ refers to John, Paul, Ringo and George, but it has no identifiable syntactic parts each of which refers to only one object. Yet, it is right to say that ‘these’ refers to Paul, *among other people*. Here we bring a simple term under a partial semantic concept. When we say that hearing *F* is going on we bring a mental simple under a particular partial concept.

To sum up: For the Atomist the parts of consciousness at a time are (i) prior to the whole and (ii) some of the atoms are mental acts. Therefore the mental reference of the whole can depend on the reference of the atoms. For Brentano, the parts of

consciousness at a time are conceptual parts, that is, they are different partial concepts that apply to one mental act. Consequently, the mental reference of the whole cannot depend on the reference of the atoms. There are no atoms. I will call Brentano's view *Mental Holism* because it gives explanatory priority to the whole.

As we have seen in § 1 in *Psychologie* Brentano took 'my soul' or 'my self' to be vacuous singular terms. Mental Holism complements this view. This connection is nicely brought out by Parfit:

Just as there can be single memory of just having had three experiences, such as hearing a bell strike three times, there can be a single state of awareness both of hearing the fourth striking of this bell, and of seeing ravens fly past the bell-tower. Reductionist claim that nothing more is involved in the unity of consciousness at a single time. Since there can be one state of awareness of several experiences, we need not explain this unity by ascribing these experiences to the same person, or subject of experiences. (Parfit 1986, 250-1)

A seeing and a hearing are not parts of one consciousness because they are activities of the same subject or soul. Rather a seeing and a hearing are *conceptual* parts of one consciousness if, and only if, they are co-conscious. A soul is neither experienced nor is it needed to conceptualise an important fact about our conscious life.

5. Mental Holism and Monism

If one adds a further premise to Brentano's key-assumption

If one is co-aware of some mental activities, these are conceptual parts of a

metaphysically simple mental act

namely:

One is co-aware of all mental activities that one undergoes at a time

one arrives at Mental *Monism*. At any time there is only one mental act. In the unpublished third volume of *Psychologie* Brentano seems to endorse Mental Monism:

The totality of our simultaneous mental activities and therefore all our simultaneous presenting belongs to one and the same reality. Everything we present can therefore in one sense be taken to be the content of *one* presentation that contains in itself a plurality of parts. (Brentano, PS 53, 53015, 20)

However, the additional premise is controversial. Marty considered cases where hypnosis brings about something similar to what are now known as ‘split-brain’ cases. In such a case, the left brain-hemisphere generates an experience as of a green spot on the left, the right brain-hemisphere generates an experience as of a red spot on the right, but there is no joint awareness of a green and red spot. Marty described these cases as follows:

If this were the case, it would not contradict our concept of the unity of consciousness. Each of these consciousnesses would be one unity. (Marty 2011, 32)

Take Brentano's use of 'we' ['our'] in the quote above. If 'we' refers to human animals like us, a human animal might suffer from split-brain syndrome. In this case not all its simultaneous mental acts are conceptual parts of one act. Some are conceptual parts of one act; others are parts of another act. If 'we' refers to soul, a non-physical bearer of mental properties, it is at least not clear why a soul should not have several 'consciousnesses'. However, more often than not, there will be a one-to-one correlation between human animals and consciousnesses at a time. In the following section I will focus on Mental Holism, and not on Mental Monism, since the latter claim is based on empirical assumptions.

6. Brentano's Epistemic Argument

So far we have clarified the main tenets of Mental Holism. It remains to answer the question 'Why accept Mental Holism?' Brentano gave in *Psychologie* (Book 2, iv, §2) a number of arguments for the conclusion that at a time co-conscious mental acts are conceptual parts of one act. The gist of these arguments can be conveyed by an analogy: If you know that *p* and I know that *q*, there is not one thinker who knows that *p* and *q*. For this to be the case, the knowledge has to be shared by one single mind. Similarly, being conscious of *a* and being conscious of *b* does not amount to consciousness of *a* and *b*, if there is not one single consciousness of *a* and *b*. The defect of this kind of argument is that it leaves open the possibility that distinct consciousness collaborate: being conscious of *a* and *b* might be a property distinct things have together or collectively, but not individually.

After *Psychologie* Brentano changed tack. In his manuscript 'On the Soul' he outlined a different argument that seems more promising. I will quote most of the first page of the manuscript because it is so far neither published nor translated. He

continued after the passage quoted in the introduction:

3. That ‘thinking, feeling, willing, seeing, hearing thing’ says something substantive [*Wesenhafte*] is obvious. If they were not to pertain to other substantive things, they would be substantive beings in their own right. In other words, they would be substances in the ancient Greek sense. [...]
4. One cannot assume that there is one single unitary *ousia* [substance] if one would simultaneously hear and see. For the one ceases while the other continues. We had to talk in line with Hume of a bundle that is composed out of many substances.
5. Yet what counts against this is [P2] *that hearing and seeing fall with self-evidence into the same consciousness*. And this consciousness in its self-evidence has a further reach. A whole chain of thought, a far reaching plan, are within its reach.

The self-evidence of perceiving would be impossible without its [perceiving’s] essential unity with the perceiver. The relation between the perceived real object and the perceiver could be merely the relation of cause and effect. Descartes already showed that where this [is the case], the possibility of an evidence does not exist. God could, he said, in any case cause all that which the external object causes.

6. *Therefore self-evidence requires a more intimate relation* [than causation] *between perceiver and perceived* [P3]. Are they perhaps only conceptually different, but the same thing? – This seems to contradict the idea that under this assumption hearing and seeing were also merely conceptually different when they occurred simultaneously in us. But this is incompatible with the

fact that they can start and cease to exist independently of each other.

(Brentano LS 1b.)

In 3. and 4. Brentano introduces Humean Atomism: joint seeing and hearing is a complex of distinct mental acts. Seeing and hearing are not just conceptual parts, but real parts. They are acts that have objects and causal powers.

In 5. and the beginning of 6. Brentano suggests an argument against Humean Atomism and for Mental Holism. At the end of 6. Brentano outlines a challenge for Mental Holism. Consider an example to make the challenge vivid. Some simultaneous mental acts like Fred's tasting the cheese and Fred's hearing the Bach cantata seem separable: one can occur without the other. Brentano took this to be a conclusive reason to take Fred's tasting the cheese and Fred's hearing the Bach cantata to be two distinct acts in their own right and not conceptual parts of one act. I will call this problem for Holism the *Separability Challenge*. How can seeing and hearing be conceptual parts of one act, and yet be separable? Brentano rejected Holism because he could see no way to meet the *Separability Challenge*. Before addressing this challenge, let's see whether Brentano has a good argument for Mental Holism.

The argument suggested by Brentano in 5. and 6. above can be spelled out further as follows:

Brentano's Epistemic Argument:

(P1) Consciousness is immediately evident acknowledgement of mental acts.

(P2) Sometimes we acknowledge several simultaneous mental acts such as

seeing and hearing with immediate evidence.

(P3) Immediate evidence requires the identity of the judgement and its subject-matter.

Hence: (C) Consciousness of simultaneous mental acts and these acts are identical.

I take the premises in order.

First (P1): *Inner consciousness is immediately evident acknowledgement of mental acts.* What is immediately evident acknowledgement? An acknowledgement is *immediately* evident only if it is infallible knowledge, that is, if the acknowledgement could not exist without its object, and *there neither is, nor need to be, a justifying reason for it.* The claim that inner consciousness is immediately evident is highly plausible. For what could be a reason that justifies or warrants consciousness of my present mental acts? When I am conscious of my seeing, I have immediate knowledge of it that is not in need of an independent warrant. Is it possible that my consciousness of seeing is mistaken? Intuitively, the answer is no.

It might seem that there is an initial problem with Brentano's claim that awareness is immediately evident that already arises for immediately evident knowledge of single acts. What is seeing?

Seeing is having a coloured thing as an object, ... (Brentano 1954, 191; my translation.)

Seeing is having a coloured thing as an object, hearing is having a sound as an object. But how can awareness of seeing be infallible with respect to the existence of the colour seen? This problem is immediately resolved if we bear in mind the distinction between the primary object and the intentional correlate. When I am aware of seeing red, I immediately and infallibly know *what I see*: the intentional correlate or immanent object (see section 2). The same awareness constitutes knowledge of the primary object of seeing, the red expanse, if the seeing is veridical; otherwise we have only knowledge of what we see. Awareness is fallible with respect to the primary object:

Just as someone acknowledges immediately himself as seeing, he acknowledges also something seen, and he does not merely acknowledge something seen by him (for this is the necessary correlate of himself as seeing), but something real, for instance a spatially extended red. But in doing so he judges blindly. The existence of the real red is not immediately evident. Immediately evident is only his existence as someone seeing red and the red as something seen by him. (Brentano 1890/1, 158 [167]; my translation)

In the good case my awareness of seeing red is immediate infallible knowledge of the perceiving and of its intentional correlate – denoted by ‘what is seen by me’ – and fallible knowledge the real object, say a red expanse.

Then (P2): *Sometimes we acknowledge several simultaneous mental acts such as seeing and hearing with immediate evidence.* Brentano puts this in metaphorical terms

when he writes that ‘hearing and seeing fall with evidence into the same consciousness’. I take this to be an important insight. When discussing the distinctive kind of knowledge we have of our present mental life, philosophers have mainly focused on the knowledge of one mental activity. Brentano takes the scope of awareness to be wider. We have immediately evident knowledge of several simultaneous mental acts. Consider again a situation in which you simultaneously see and hear. You can with immediate evidence know of your seeing and hearing. You may not know with immediate evidence of your seeing and know with immediate evidence of your hearing. But because you simultaneously see and hear you can know of these activities together with immediate evidence. You can know of these activities with immediate evidence, although you can’t distinguish or describe them, as long as they are together differentiated from other activities. Indeed it seems easier and more basic to acknowledge some things together than one thing in isolation.

Brentano often described this in mereological terms. Simultaneous mental acts are given to us as one whole:

We emphasized as a distinguishing characteristic the fact that the mental phenomena which we perceive, in spite of all their multiplicity, always appear to us as a unity, while physical phenomena, which we perceive at the same time, do not all appear in the same way as parts of one single phenomenon.

(Brentano 1874 I, 137 [75])⁹

If we are always jointly aware of many things, it is difficult to attend to one of them in particular. If many things are simultaneously given, it requires extra mental effort to

pick out one of these things in particular. Hence, we are prone to make mistakes as Brentano explained later in the second edition of *Psychologie*:

Inner perception is confused [...] and although this imperfection does not affect its evidence, it has caused many mistakes. (Brentano 1874 II, 141 [216]; my translation.)

‘Confused’ contrasts with ‘distinct’: we are aware of some mental acts, but not distinctly in the sense that each of them is given to us in perception. We need to compare and contrast our mental acts with each other to make them distinct. This activity is not immune to error. Only our acknowledgement of *these* activities *together* is immune to error.

Finally (P3): *The immediate evidence of inner perception ‘requires essential unity of perceiver and the object perceived’.* Brentano supported (P3) with a further consideration:

One can now show that such an immediate knowledge of a fact is only thinkable if the knower and the known stand in the relation of identity. While the known is not absolutely necessary, but only known as a mere fact, it is obvious that it has to persist as long as the evident perceiving directed on it. For otherwise there would be the contradiction of an evident and false judgement. Hence, what we come to know as a mere fact is known as relatively necessary. This would be unthinkable if what is known were not identical with the knower because, of the two independent

objects, one could cease to and the other persist unaltered without contradiction. (Brentano 1954, 228; my translation)

This quote is helpful, but it is also in need of explanation. If Brentano's conclusion were really that the knower and the known are the same, this would constitute a *reductio ad absurdum* of one of Brentano's premises. For when I know with immediate evidence of my pain, I am neither identical with my pain nor with the state of affairs that there is pain. Brentano's claim, charitably understood, is that awareness of a mental act can only be immediately evident if awareness of the mental act and the act are the same.

Why is this supposed to be the case? Consciousness is immediately evident acknowledgement (symbolised as 'J_e' below). An immediately evident acknowledgement *guarantees* the existence of its object:

$$\text{Nec. } (\exists !J_e(a) \rightarrow \exists !a.)$$

When I acknowledge with immediate evidence seeing and hearing together at a time *t*, it must be the case at *t* that seeing and hearing are going on. So the contingent existence of one object, the judgement, necessitates the existence of some other objects (and *vice versa*).

But how can there be a necessary relation between distinct contingent existences?¹⁰ It seems deeply puzzling that one thing should be able to necessitate the existence of another.

One response to this puzzlement is to argue that the things under consideration are not completely distinct, but one 'contributes to the being of the

other'. Siewert gives a good illustration of this strategy:

I might deny that the referent of my demonstrative causes my thought about it – not on the grounds of epiphenomenalism – but rather, on the grounds that the referent of 'this,' the experience I refer to, and my thinking that this is a painful feeling, are not wholly distinct events, such as may be causally related. I would say the occurrence of my thinking that this is a painful feeling could not have happened without the experience it is about, for that experience is itself a constituent of the event which is my thinking – the thinking about the experience is not an event separable from the experience thought about. (Siewert 2001, 554)

My consciousness of my current pain could not exist without its object. However, if we take the consciousness of my pain and my pain to be numerically distinct, we have an unexplained necessary connection between contingent 'distinct existences'. Siewert tries to explain this necessary connection away in terms of a constituency relation: the pain is a constituent of the consciousness.

But do we have an independently plausible account of this constituency relation? In general, wholes other than mereological sums may have different constituents. An orchestra is composed at different times of different musicians. Hence, the whole may exist without the parts that actually make it up. If we want to allow for immediate evidence in terms of constituency, we need to assume that it is impossible that the whole has other parts than the ones it actually has. This introduces a new unexplained necessary connection between distinct contingent existences.¹¹

Brentano pursued a different strategy: *there is no necessary relation between distinct existences, because there are no distinct existences*. There is only one mental act that is conceived of under different modes or presentation. *Awareness of seeing blue and hearing F, seeing blue and hearing F* are only conceptually different, but really identical. Hence, we arrive at the conclusion:

(C) Consciousness of simultaneous mental acts and these acts are identical.

Brentano's conclusion provides him with a relation between consciousness and its objects that is compatible with the immediate evidence of the former: identity.¹² If one does not want to assume unexplained necessary relations between distinct contingent existences, identity seems to be the best bet for the relation between the immediately evident judgement and its object. They are the same thing conceived of under different concepts.

Does Brentano's argument lead to the unwelcome consequence that all immediately evident judgements are identical with their subject-matter? This would be a *reductio ad absurdum* since, for instance, the immediately evident judgement that $1 = 1$ cannot be identical with the fact that $1 = 1$. But the obvious fact that $1 = 1$ can obtain without anybody making the corresponding judgement. Hence, it can't be identical to such a judgement. There is no possible world in which we make the judgement that $1 = 1$ and it is not the case that $1 = 1$, although judgement and fact judged are distinct existences. If at least one of the 'distinct existences' necessarily obtains, there is no need to explain the necessary connection away.

Brentano's *Modus Ponens* is Armstrong's *Modus Tollens*. In his

Materialist Theory of the Mind Armstrong argued that the analogue of the awareness of our mental acts is a mechanism that scans its own internal states.

Armstrong continues:

It is clear here that the operation of scanning and the situation scanned must be 'distinct existences'. A machine can scan itself only in the same sense that a man can eat himself. (Armstrong 1968, 107)

I can only eat myself by eating a part of me, say my leg, and my leg is not me. A machine can only scan itself by scanning a part of itself. Hence, (C) is false and therefore awareness cannot be immediately evident.

Armstrong's criticism sheds light on Brentano's position. For Brentano and his students this shows that there is no reason to think of awareness as the scanning of mental states. We can reflect and observe our mental acts. This might fruitfully be thought of as an internal scanning. But awareness is supposed to be different from reflection and observation. Armstrong's criticism brings out the importance of the distinction between awareness and observation.

7. The Separability Challenge

If joint seeing and hearing are different sides of one act, they are not separable. However, it seems highly plausible that they are separable and therefore not-identical. In *Psychologie* Brentano was aware of this Separability Challenge, but dodged it:

This assumption [the unity of consciousness] has its difficulties. If all simultaneous mental acts never were anything but divisives of one and the

same unified thing, how could one of them be independent of another one?

And yet this is the case: neither in their coming nor in their ceasing to be are they tied to each other. Consider, for instance, hearing and seeing: sometimes the first occurs without the second and the second without the first, and if they exist simultaneously, one perhaps goes out of existence while the other continues to exist. (Brentano 1874 I, 224 [122]; in part my translation)

If hearing and seeing are distinct existences, they are not divisives of one presentation. Hence, Brentano can no longer answer the question ‘What is the relation between seeing, hearing and consciousness of seeing and hearing that allows for the immediate evidence of the latter?’ by saying that the acts involved are divisives or sides of one presentation. A new answer is needed that is compatible with the fact that seeing and hearing are distinct. We need a relation between (i) hearing *F*, (ii) seeing blue, and (iii) the awareness of hearing *F* and seeing blue that is compatible with numerical difference between (i)—(iii), yet allows (iii) to be immediately evident with respect to (i) and (ii).

8. Brentano’s Response to the Separability Challenge

The relation we are looking for, Brentano proposed, is the relation of a substance to its accidents, the properties that are particularized by it.

In general, a substance is something that has properties, but is not the property of anything.¹³ More precisely, a substance has properties, but it is impossible that it is had by something as a property. A substance can, but need not remain the same in changes; there are fleeting substances. For example, Brentano took colour patches to be substances. If there is something that ‘performs’ mental activities such as seeing,

hearing, thinking, willing etc. as accidents without itself being a mental activity, it is a *mental substance*. A *self* is a soul that has one accident that is directed upon the soul whose accident it is.¹⁴ Mental Holism dispensed with mental substances and selves: at any time there is one mental act that has many objects, among them itself. But the mental act is not an accident of a mental substance.

How is the introduction of a mental substance supposed to address the Separability Challenge? We need first the notion of substantial identity. If two distinct accidents are instantiated in the same substance, they are *substantially identical*. Substantial identity is *not* a relation between a substance and itself, but a relation between accidents. Awareness of ϕ -ing and ϕ -ing are both accidents. Brentano argued that awareness of ϕ -ing is immediately evident if, and only if, awareness of ϕ -ing and ϕ -ing are substantially identical.¹⁵ This idea allows (i) hearing *F*, (ii) seeing blue, and (iii) the awareness of hearing *F* and seeing blue to be distinct and separable. But the fact that (i)—(iii) inhere in the same soul, argues Brentano, makes it possible that (iii) is an evident acknowledgement of (i) and (ii).

Evident acknowledgement is supposed to be infallible. Hence, it is not possible that awareness of hearing *F* and seeing blue exists without hearing *F* and seeing blue existing. The introduction of a mental substance would help to meet the Separability Challenge only if substantially identical accidents stood in necessary relations to each other. However, in general, there is no necessary relation between different accidents of the same substance. For illustration assume that I am a substance. I am hungry and thirsty at the same time, but I might have been hungry and tired, but not thirsty at that time. If there is no necessary relation between the accidents of a substance, awareness of seeing and hearing and seeing and hearing can be accidents of the same substance, yet the former may exist while the latter doesn't.

Therefore substantial sameness between a mental act and awareness of it does not underwrite the immediate evidence of awareness. So substantial identity does not pull its weight in the theory of consciousness.

To sum up: In ‘On the Soul’ Brentano rejects Mental Holism and turns to a substance ontology of the mind. His argument is so far unconvincing. The substance ontology faces the same problem as Mental Monism; it does not solve it. However, he did not only posit a soul as a bearer of mental activities. He argued further that *we experience the soul*. This is a striking claim and if it were right, it would give us a good reason to address the Separability Challenge in the framework of substance ontology. But are mental substances objects of experience?

9. Brentano counters Hume

Hume reported his introspective findings as follows:

I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception.

How can one argue against Hume that a mental substance is given to us in inner perception? Let us look closely at three passages arranged in chronological order that contain Brentano’s response to Hume:

(A) If our I intuitively appears to us as thinking and willing, *it appears to us with accidents*, but someone would err who believes that the appearance would not contain a substance intuitively given. (Brentano 1903, 33; my translation)

(B) 1. The appearances of inner perception show us ourselves as a substance with mental accidents. These are seeing, hearing, conceptual thinking in manifold ways, judging, feeling, desiring, pleasure, anger etc.

3. Perhaps one can add that they [the objects of inner perception] are distinguished in that they never appear without accidents while so-called outer perception only reveals substantial differences. [...]

4. In what is said lies that *we never perceive our substance on its own*, but that we perceive it inclusively [*einschlussweise wahrnehmen*] as soon as we have an inner perception. (Brentano 1907, 142-43; my translation)

(C) [Aristotle] recognized completely correctly that if we apprehend ourselves as thinking things, *we don't apprehend our substance in isolation* [für sich allein], but that *we apprehend with it an accident*, that in manifold changes belongs to our substance at one time and then not at another. (Brentano 1912/3, 154 [117])

The gist of Brentano's response to Hume is as follows: Fair enough David, I also never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception. But this does not exclude that I perceive *myself only in combination with a perceiving*.¹⁶

In order to see Brentano's point consider the following analogy with object perception:

I never see a house without any properties and I never see anything but properties. Hence, I never see a house.

The conclusion that we never see a house is certainly unwelcome. How come that most philosophers are happy to draw the parallel conclusion that we are never introspectively aware of a mental substance?

Part of the diagnosis of the mistake in the argument under discussion is that it assumes that in order to see a physical object one needs to see it ‘without any properties’. But how could one see an object without any of its properties or even as something that is distinct from its properties? A ‘bare particular’ is certainly not a visible thing. The same goes for introspection. If perception of myself requires perceiving a ‘bare self’, it cannot be done. The right response to this problem is to revise one’s view of what perceiving an object – in contrast to perceiving some features/properties/parts –consists in.

Another part of the diagnosis is that Hume is concerned with *introspection or observation*. Introspecting is the intentional act of focusing attention on particular elements of one’s mental life. It is therefore unsurprising that in introspection only mental acts are given to us, we try to attend to them. The soul may not be an object of introspection, but, as Brentano argued, one can be aware of it together with other things.

10. Perceiving the Soul

Brentano argued that mental substances are given in consciousness together with mental accidents; physical substances are given in outer perception together with spatial and qualitative properties.¹⁷ Here is a representative quote:

[1.] When a concrete, that is, localized coloured thing appears in intuition to us, it appears (and here I allow myself to correct an inconsequence of

Aristotle) nothing accidental, but a substance. The object that appears appears with colour and location but these appear not as accidents. Rather its spatial and qualitative determinations are to be conceived as its substantial differences which mutually individuate each other. And when our self intuitively appears to us as thinking and willing it appears to us with accidents. But we would be mistaken that the appearance did not contain a substance intuitively given. The substance is what bestows the individual difference on thinking and willing if there is another person that thinks and wills the same as we do. [2] The fact that the individualizing moment can be neither noticed nor characterized in its difference from the one that is given in the appearance of the other person who thinks and wills as we do is an obvious consequence of the limitation that all our mental perceptions concern only our own person. [3] But someone who denied that our perception of mental acts contained an individuating moment without its being noticed had to deny the truth that is accepted by all psychologists that every intuition, also inner intuition, is individual and for this reason deserves the name intuition and no longer the name general concept. (Brentano 1903, 32-33; my translation)

First, outer perception and physical substances. We perceive a physical substance with those properties that individuate it and which mutually individuate each other. ([1]) Please keep in mind here that for Brentano a yellow patch is a *bona fide* substance. The patch is individuated by its location and colour. The same colour patch could not be somewhere else and be differently coloured.¹⁸ It is jointly individuated by its location and qualities.¹⁹ This yellow patch could not have had a different colour

and form at the time. When one perceives the yellow patch, one perceives it with its substantial differences.

Then, inner perception and mental substances. Brentano argued in ([3]) that while the combination of spatial location and quality individuates a physical substance, its mental activities do not individuate a mental substance. For instance, *different* thinkers may fear the same object at the same time. Mental substances individuate their accidents and not the other way round. For example, Marty states in his introductory lectures about descriptive psychology:

Location and quality interpenetrate each other so to say, the one is the fundament of the other. There must be something that is connected in a similarly intimate manner with our states of consciousness yet which is not a state of consciousness but which is its fundament just as location and quality are in the realm of the physical.

One may call this substance. (Marty 2011, 30; my translation)

Let us accept for the purposes of our argument that the soul individuates mental activities: numerical difference of soul makes for numerical difference of mental act.

In (3) Brentano suggests the following argument:

(P3) The soul individuates mental acts.

(P2) Particular mental acts can only be given in inner consciousness if what individuates them is also given in inner consciousness.

Therefore (C) The soul is given in inner awareness.

If the soul, the individuating principle of mental acts, is not given in inner consciousness, inner consciousness could only present us with types of mental acts that can be shared between different souls, but not particulars, or a particular totality of mental acts.

I see no reason to follow Brentano here. In order to perceive a particular object *a*, it must appear distinct from its surroundings. An object can appear distinct from its surroundings in virtue of a number of contingent and non-individuating properties. I see the chameleon because of its striking colouring that contrasts with its environment, the giraffe because of its striking movement, but neither of these features make these animals what they are. If it is in general implausible that a feature that individuates a particular object *a* needs to be perceived in order to perceive *a*, why take this thesis to be true for inner consciousness?

Even if Brentano's argument were convincing, its consequence would be deeply unsatisfactory. For although the mental substance is supposed to be perceived with its accidents, it cannot be noticed.²⁰ Why? The reason is given in ([2]). In inner perception a unified whole is given to us whose parts are not articulated for us. We notice elements of the unified whole when there is a partial change in our mental life that creates a contrast. When we perceive first *A* and *B* together, then *B* and *C* together, where *C* and *A* are incompatible, this contrast makes *A* (or *C*) stand out. *A* (*C*) becomes noticeable and we can come to acknowledge *A* (*C*) as well as the whole it is part of.²¹ This conception of noticing sets limits to what can be noticed.²² If you lived in a world in which everything was blue, you could not compare and contrast blue with other colours. There would be no contrast cases and we can suppose that the inhabitants of the blue-only world cannot visually imagine any. According to Brentano, every one of us is in a similar situation with respect to the individuating

principle of his mental life; his soul. Because we are not conscious of the mental life of others, we cannot compare and contrast our mental activities with those of other thinkers and thereby come to notice the difference between our and their mental activities.

Imagine there is a super-chameleon in the scene you are now seeing. It is part of the scene, but it adapts so quickly that it can never be distinguished from its surroundings. The chameleon is in the visual scene before your eyes. But it is nomologically impossible for you to notice it. Your mental substance is like a super-chameleon: it cannot be noticed when you are aware of it together with other things. For this reason we cannot come to form a positive conception of the soul.

Stumpf developed an objection along the same lines against Brentano's theory of substance perception. Brentano proposed that a substance is part of each of its properties. I have set this idea so far aside. Stumpf framed his objections to Brentano in this terminology:

It has not become clear to me how one is supposed to detect this part [the substance] that is contained in every property. Is it not a superfluous plus with respect to the perceivable facts? I don't doubt that there are unnoticeable parts and unnoticeable changes of perceptual contents. *But the archphenomenon from which we are supposed to abstract a concept has to stand out from the rest by noticeable distinctions or changes.* It seems to me therefore that this X which is contained in all properties as part raises the same difficulties as Locke's X that is added to all properties, at least if one, as Brentano always did, holds that all concepts are derived from intuitions. (Stumpf 1939, 41; my translation and emphasis)

I will not take a stand here on the question of whether physical substances are noticeable or not. But Stumpf's objection applies directly to the perception of mental substances. Objects of experience are objects about which we can come to know by observing them and our concepts of them are, at least in part, formed by and acquired on the basis of such observations. For instance, a tree is something that looks and feels a certain way and behaves in observable ways under certain conditions. But even if our soul is co-perceived it cannot be observed. It does not stand in our consciousness and we cannot therefore explore it in consciousness. Brentano and Hume, then, agree that the soul cannot be *observed*.

In sum: Brentano has argued that Hume's slogan 'The soul is not given in inner perception' is true if one understands it as saying that the soul is not given *in isolation from its accidents* in inner perception. So understood the slogan is not only true, but trivially true and therefore uninteresting. We get a true and interesting reading if we precisify the slogan to the thesis that *the soul is given in inner perception together with its accidents*. Although this thesis may be true, the soul still fails to be an object of experience in the sense we are interested in. For while the soul can be co-perceived, it cannot be noticed. But we need to notice it if inner perception is to be a source of knowledge of the soul.

To sum up: The soul is not a valuable posit and it is an object of experience only *in a Pickwickian sense*. But if one does one want to do without it and defend Mental Holism, one needs to answer the Separability Challenge in a new way. I will conclude the paper by suggesting such an alternative response.

12. A Different Response to the Separability Challenge

Let us take a closer look at Brentano's intuitive motivation for separability:

What is meant when we talk in the second case [of simultaneous seeing and hearing] of two acts? Thereby we refer to the fact that one can stop *without the other being disturbed in its unchanged continuation*. I stop seeing the coloured when I close my eyes, but still hear the music; and vice versa, it becomes quiet and I still see what I saw previously. (Brentano 1954, 191; my translation and emphasis)

Brentano made a case for separability via a temporal consideration. This is already problematic because Mental Holism states only that all mental acts *at a time* are conceptual parts of a unity. But let us set this aside for the moment. Brentano's scenario is as follows:

At t , Karl is hearing F and seeing blue & At t' , Karl continues hearing F , but has stopped seeing blue.

It is important for Brentano's consideration that seeing and hearing are processes that start, continue to go on, and stop. Such processes have temporal parts, or phases. The phases of one process may differ in various ways, yet still be phases of one process. The fact that one process stops while the other continues undisturbed leaves open the question of whether the phases of the processes are identical or not. For example, every phase of seeing blue could be identical to a phase of hearing F , but not *vice versa* as there are later phases of hearing F without seeing blue. This allows Brentano to hold that if at a time both seeing blue and hearing F 'fall with self-evidence in the same consciousness', they are 'sides' of the same presentation.²³

This observation is, however, not sufficient to meet the Separability Challenge. While Brentano did not put forth modal considerations to argue for separability, he could have done so. For is it not plausible to assume that while in fact Karl heard F and saw blue at t , he might have heard F and touched metal at t ? Hence, hearing and seeing at t , the phases of a mental act, are separable and therefore distinct existences.

The key to meeting the Separability Challenge is the principle which gives rise to the challenge. When do we have a real and not merely a conceptual difference? Brentano's answer, in more explicit form, was:

(RealDifference) Given two concepts C_1 and C_2 that denote at most one object (event), if it is possible that C_1 is satisfied without C_2 being satisfied (and *vice versa*), the satisfier of $C_1 \neq$ the satisfier of C_2 .

Consider an example to see the intuition that makes (RealDifference) plausible. John's seeing Hesperus at noon is the same event as John's seeing Phosphorus at noon. This identity is not obvious because we conceive of the same event under different concepts, namely the concepts [John's seeing Hesperus at noon] and [John's seeing Phosphorus at noon]. If John's seeing Hesperus at noon is the same event as John's seeing Phosphorus at noon, it is impossible that John sees Phosphorus at noon without seeing Hesperus at noon (and *vice versa*). In turn, if it is possible that John sees x at time t without seeing y at time t , then x and y are really distinct.

However, (RealDifference) is implausible for objects or events that stand in multiple relations to some things and can be uniquely described in terms of a relation to one of these objects. This sounds rather abstract. So let us consider an example: the

brother of John might be no one else than the father of Jim. However, while Ted is in fact both, the brother of John and the father of Jim, he might have been only the brother of John and not also the father of Jim. This possibility does not show that the brother of John is a different person from the father of Jim: there are not two persons here. There is still only one person that satisfies two different concepts that relate the same person to two different people.

Now, the concepts [*S*'s seeing blue at *t*] and [*S*'s hearing *F* at *t*] are just like [the brother of John] and [the father of Jim]. That is, different descriptions of the same thing that describe one object in terms of its different relations to two distinct objects. As we have seen, it is independently plausible that one and the same thing can satisfy different descriptions of this kind, although it is possible that it only satisfied one and not the other (at a time). Hence, [*S*'s seeing blue at *t*] and [*S*'s hearing *F* at *t*] can be satisfied by the same act and be mere conceptual parts of it, although the act might have satisfied only one of the concepts.

Conclusion

After *Psychologie* Brentano sided with Descartes against Hume because he convinced himself that some simultaneous mental acts are 'distinct existences' and not mere 'sides' of one presentation. He reintroduced the soul to use the relation of substantial identity to tie these distinct existences together. However, the soul neither pulls its weight in the theory of consciousness nor is it an object of experience. Moreover, Brentano's argument that separability implies real distinctness is unconvincing. Hence, Mental Holism seems still plausible. At any time, there is only one presentation and, for instance, seeing as well as consciousness of seeing are

abstractions from it. This view of the metaphysics of mind deserves more attention than Brentano himself has given it.²⁴

¹ Hume's appeal to introspection has impressed upon a number of philosophers that one can't have perceptual knowledge of a bearer of mental properties. A case in point is Kant (1783 § 48). Recent examples are Johnston (2007, 257) and Prinz (2012, 148). Chisholm 1969 is an exception that draws inspiration from Brentano's later work.

² References are to the two-volume reprint of the 1925 edition of *Psychologie* edited by Oskar Kraus; page references for the English translation are in square brackets.

³ Guillaume Frechette (personal communication) takes the ms. to be written in the 1870s. If this is right, Brentano changed his mind very soon after *Psychologie*.

⁴ See Brentano (1907, 97).

⁵ I have in part re-translated this passage. The original translation turned a sufficient condition into a necessary condition.

⁶ For a detailed discussion of Brentano's distinction between immanent and real object and its import see Sauer 2006 and Moran (1996, 7f).

⁷ See Mackie (1997, 45).

⁸ See Shaffer (2010, 47).

⁹ See also Brentano (1928, 27-8).

¹⁰ See also Hossack (2002, 126) and Armstrong (1968, 106).

¹¹ This challenge arises for all accounts that replace identity with ontological dependence or a similar relation. For example, Textor (2006 §5) faces this challenge. For discussion of similar problems see Weisberg 2008 and Kidd 2011.

¹² See also Brentano (1874 I, 198-199 [109]).

¹³ See Brentano (1903, 31).

¹⁴ See Brentano (1912/3, 142).

¹⁵ See Brentano (1907, 143).

¹⁶ William James (1890, 299) pursues a similar line of thought: ‘It only meant that in the stream of consciousness *it never was found all alone*. But when it is found, it is felt; just as the body is felt, the feeling of which is also an abstraction, *because never is the body felt all alone, but always together with other things.*’

¹⁷ See, for example, Brentano (1912/3, 157).

¹⁸ See Brentano (1890/1, 16 [19]).

¹⁹ See Marty (2011, 30).

²⁰ See also Marty (1903, 34-5).

²¹ See Brentano (1890/1, 55 [57]).

²² See Brentano (1890/1, 61 [57]).

²³ See Tye (2007, 197) for a different response to the Separability Challenge.

²⁴ I would like to thank Giulia Felappi, Bob Hale, Uriah Kriegel and Eliot Michaelson for comments that led to significant changes of the paper and to Jon Barton for discussions about Brentano’s argument. I am grateful to Guillaume Frech  tte for bringing Brentano’s manuscript ‘Von der Seele’ to my attention and making the transcription available. Many thanks to Denis Fisette for providing me with Koffka’s transcript of Stumpf’s lectures.

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